

Wrestling Perspective

• Analysis and Commentary From The McLaughlin Group of Professional Wrestling •

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Can Eddie Gilbert Be Hot Stuff Again?

Eddie Gilbert's career has been on the skids for nearly a year. Once considered one of the best young minds in the business, Gilbert has spent most of the past year away from the spotlight that once shined so brightly on his future and recently, severed his contract with the NWA. The breakup was inevitable especially after his all too honest comments in the July 5 issue of Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly, and to a lesser extent, in the June 25 issue of Matwatch. However, it seems as though Gilbert's departure has now freed him to prove again why he is one of the best.

Gilbert has been through a lot during the past year, especially the last three months. Once he lost his spot on the NWA's booking committee, his career, due to politics, took a nose dive. He went from a U.S. Tag Team Champion to putting over The Great Muta, Kevin Sullivan, Arn Anderson, Lex Luger and Ric Flair on national television. When his contract was up for renewal, speculation ran rampant of an alliance of independent promoters spearheaded by Gilbert and Paul E. Dangerously. Gilbert resigned with the NWA, continued to put people over, though to a lesser extent, and the speculation subsided. Then he suffered a shoulder injury in March that kept him out of action until recently. He was accused of faking the injury and told to get back in the ring. He was accused of giving up on the sport, being bitter about not receiving the NWA booking position and some even suggested that his divorce from Missy Hyatt kept him out of action. He showed good faith by offering the NWA the option of withholding his salary while he was injured. Then again, that may have been a ploy to get out of his contract as he now appears ready to return to the ring. Still, there appeared to be no future for him in the NWA and, perhaps, he decided to press the issue with his Torch interview. Only one week after it was published, Gilbert and the NWA had parted ways.

When we started Wrestling Perspective six months ago, we planned to lead off issue #2 with an article about Gilbert and Dangerously called "The Future of Wrestling." However, Gilbert resigned with the NWA and that idea was put to rest. A few months later, it appears, once again, that Gilbert may be the future of wrestling. While Gilbert is a first rate heel, his real talent is booking. He's no Ric Flair in the ring, but Flair doesn't come close to touching Gilbert when it comes to booking. He has a great mind for business and is able to develop talent and interesting angles. His work for the CWF and Memphis clearly shows a successful track record of drawing large crowds with less than all-star talent. Had he been able to book the NWA, who has the deepest talent base in the country, the question of success would not be if, but when. Unfortunately, the NWA was unable to read Gilbert's resume or understand what he could have done for them. Fortunately, they have chosen not to stifle his talents any further. They may, however, regret this move as any work he does for a competing promotion, should be successful and the NWA brass will shake their collective heads saying "Why didn't we...?"

There are a number of options available to Gilbert. He recently arrived as a heel in Memphis and they may give him the booking position. This could provide Jarrett Promotions with the chance to flourish again as Gilbert has worked successfully with Jerry Lawler and Bill Dundee in the past. While the talent base in Memphis is suspect at best, he

could attract some new talent and develop some of the younger wrestler in the promotion. Should he be given the book for the Dallas end of the spectrum, there could be no limit to what he could do. While the Von Erichs don't mean much today, he could be able to create some interesting angles with Chris Adams, John Tatum and some of the younger wrestlers. Jarrett has given us Scott Steiner, Sid Vicious, the Original SST and played a part in developing The Great Muta. Now imagine if they had Gilbert, who could actually work with young talent and not waste it. Provided he could attract enough talent, there is no doubt Gilbert would make the USWA successful.

Another option would be for Gilbert to book the new promotion being formed by international investors. This promotion has yet to start up, but the prospect of Gilbert booking a promotion with international financing is one of the most exciting possibilities in wrestling today. Look at the past success he's had on shoe-string budgets. If he had deep financial resources available, there is no telling what Gilbert could accomplish. A new promotion headed by Gilbert, and there is talk of Bill Watts being involved, could possibly recreate the excitement of the UWF. Chances are Watts learned from his mistakes and with international resources, the marketing and promotion problems that killed the UWF, could be avoided. Gilbert lost out on the chance to book a promotion with an all-star talent roster when the NWA overlooked him. A new promotion might be able to finance Gilbert an all-star talent base to work with. After all, Ricky Steamboat, Terry Taylor, The Fantastics, Al Perez, Owen Hart, Cactus Jack, Terry Gordy and Steve Williams are all available. Plus the new federation could work out a talent trade with a Japanese promotion and probably obtain the top talents in Portland, Dallas and other small promotions.

While the WWF arrogantly runs roughshod over all other U.S. promotions, and the NWA continues to search for its identity, the time for the proposed promotion to start up is now. With a new promotion led by Gilbert and possibly Watts, a few key talent acquisitions, financial support, a television deal and the proper marketing, the WWF may find itself with formidable competition while the NWA finds itself impoverished. Since the NWA thought Gilbert was virtually useless, he will not be missed by the promotion at first and neither will his six-figure contract. But, if he does book another promotion, especially the proposed new one, NWA officials may rue the day they let "Hot Stuff" get away. Gilbert is still a young man with a bright future ahead of him. He has made some mistakes in the past and has been the victim of jealousy, but he has been able to keep a positive outlook on his future in the business. Although he has not been actively booking or competing in the ring for some time, he still has it in him to succeed. Now may be his chance of a lifetime.

Sidelines

Our Prayers and thoughts go out to Ed "Brutus Beefcake" Leslie and his family as he recovers from a terrible parasailing accident. Take care and get well soon.

Thanks To Wade Keller of *Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly* for his recent plug. Also a special note of thanks to Jim Dough and Joe DiCarlo for their super complimentary plug in *Wrestling Style*. We appreciate the help.

Arena Report is an excellent bimonthly newsletter edited by Ron Lemieux. It features results, a ramblings (gossip/news) section, featured columnists (including *Wrestling Then & Now's* Evan Ginsburg and *RWRB Sushi's* Jeff Mullins) and other entertaining stuff from Ron. On top of that, it is a steal at 75 cents an issue. Definitely worth checking out. Available from Ron Lemieux, 916 Sloewood Ct., Lake Mary, FL 32746.

The Wrestling Perspective Submission Manual is available to anyone who is interested in submitting feature length articles to *Wrestling Perspective*. Simply drop us a note and we'll send you a copy.

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Video Tape Review

By - David Skolnick

#107 - WB #37 - Florida '82 - '84

If you're a fan of early '80's Florida wrestling, this tape is a must buy. Although the picture quality is poor, as it's a fourth generation dub from a Newark, N.J. UHF television station, the action is top-notch. The tape starts off with a 1988 CWA show including a great Eddie Gilbert interview and then moves on to more than three hours of legendary Florida angles. #107 - WB #37 - Florida '82 - '84 includes the Ron Bass turn on Dusty Rhodes, an attempted hanging of Kevin Sullivan, the famous saddle match between Bass and Barry Windham, plus dozens of run-ins. Viewers are also treated to a non-title match between Harley Race and Windham. Say what you will about Rhodes, but the man put Florida wrestling on the map. An added attraction at the end of the tape is the Bob Backlund vs. Jimmy Snuka MSG cage match and Superfly's subsequent face turn. *Strongly Recommended.*

#107 - WB #37 - Florida '82 - '84 is available from Brian Tramel, 1806 Self Circle Apt.#B, Jonesboro, AR 72401 for \$16.00.

Pro Wrestling: The Last Sanctioned Haven For Racism

By - Vic Stanley

P&D - This is the first of a three part series by Vic Stanley covering racism, classism and sexism in wrestling. We hope you enjoy.

Pro wrestling has always been a showcase for white All-American heroes to display their dominance over insidious Orientals, cannibalistic South Sea islanders, godless commie Russians, ruthless Arabs and bloodthirsty African headhunters. Since the early 70s, it has been especially important to fabricate superior American role models in an era where the USA lost out in the Viet Nam War, the Mideast crisis and in business relations with Japan. However, it is time for the industry to accept the fact that the concept of the All-American hero should not be limited to White Anglo Saxons. If this country is truly a cultural melting pot where everyone can rise to his or her own level of excellence, then why is it

necessary to portray non-White performers as either evil or inferior?

In the old World Class promotion, Steve Simpson was originally billed as a face from South Africa, which was the truth. But as the news about apartheid gradually filled the headlines, in order to avoid any controversy, he suddenly became a citizen of "generic" Africa. At about the same time, Colonel DeBeers, a heel, appeared on the Morton Downey Jr. radio show in Chicago espousing racial hatred of the most vile nature. He told a tale of being a member of the South African Mercenary Army, which actually does exist in some form. He went so far as to say that he earned a stripe for every ear that he amputated from Black victims that he personally tortured and murdered. These statements brought all the Neo-Nazis out of the woodwork, turning the show into a primer in hate, which even Downey could not control. When he appears at house shows, his chest is loaded with medals and decorations indicating that he has killed many Blacks. The very name "DeBeers" (a South African diamond company) was chosen because it is associated with apartheid and the segregated, monolithic industrial complex in South Africa. He also eventually dyed his hair blonde to appear even more Aryan. He has regularly used racial supremacy as his angle, refusing to wrestle Black wrestlers and other "mongrels" like Jimmy Snuka. Verne Gagne would appear on camera condemning this behavior, when actually he was more than pleased at the heat this sordid angle generated. Perhaps this is yet another reason why Gagne's AWA is headed towards bankruptcy.

Ricky Steamboat is one of the few Oriental wrestlers in recent times to be pushed successfully as a hero. However, he has been portrayed as Hawaiian (ie. All-American) rather than admitting he is of Japanese ancestry. Thus he is subliminally envisioned as an enemy of the Japanese. In fact, he battled Mr. Fuji and his charge, Don Muraco, in an attempt to save the federation from falling into evil Japanese hands. Steamboat can't be blamed for this since it was always his intent to be a positive role model for kids and he did what he had to do to accomplish this. Even during his "Dragon" period, no direct references to Japan were ever made, even though this was at a time when American Ninja films were popular.

Take the example of the June 18, 1990 edition of WWF Prime Time Wrestling to see how racial issues are treated in the world of professional wrestling. After a match involving Mr. Fuji's Orient Express, Bobby Heenan felt compelled to use the term "Jap" twice in rapid succession. Gorilla Monsoon, while displaying almost uncontrollable consternation and agitation for Hulk Hogan's phony injuries, let these repeated racial slurs go unchallenged. I wonder what his reaction might have been if Heenan instead called Monsoon a "A No-Good Greasy Wop" or "A Traitorous Mussolini Loving Guinea." Along with the Pearl Harbor and WWII paranoia, the fact that Orientals are so successful in the real business world has caused them to be portrayed as inferior and untrustworthy in the imaginary realm of wrestling. This way, Americans can display their Rambo-like superiority, if only on TV. Racial pride is a wonderful thing, but not at the expense of others. Unfortunately, the minority performers allow themselves to be exploited, while the promoters callously allow racial hatred to increase ticket sales.

The NWA, under the direct influence of Ole Anderson, Jim Herd and Ted Turner, has taken a sickening turn back to the plantation mind set (not that they haven't always been there anyway). The angles involving Rocky King, Junkyard Dog and Thunderbolt Patterson vs. the Four Horsemen is proof positive. The WCW/NWA axis is acting out of desperation with this type of approach. They are confused, so they have taken the cheap and easy way out by attempting to create racial polarization among the fans. Obviously they have no intention of ever crowning a Black World Champion if they are pushing JYD as a contender. The fact that there are precious few reputable Black wrestlers with legitimate drawing power is a peripheral problem which warrants its own article. WCW knows that when it comes down to the big title match, nobody would ever accept JYD as a believable winner over Ric Flair. After much bluster, it will ultimately come down to JYD and his allies humiliated, subjugated and run out of town by the Four Horsemen. The Black performers further compound the problem by willingly participating in their "Amos

and Andy" schtick thus perpetuating the "massa/slave relationship." On one hand Turner espouses his one world/one people philosophy, while at the same time, he allows the bigoted scenarios above. While he forbids the use of the term "foreign" he allows much more blatant hate tactics to be utilized.

Heels should be simply hated for the fact that they cheat and lie. The best heels are those who come as a surprise, such as when Lex Luger or Flair suddenly turn. Arrogance is a trait that Americans can really relate to in a love/hate relationship with the performers. The fans in Japan don't automatically boo American wrestlers as "Imperialist Yankee Dogs." They appreciate talent and effort, and don't heckle wrestlers of any particular nationality unless they are lousy workers. In this respect, I think the Japanese fans approach the sport with a much more mature, intelligent and knowledgeable attitude.

The fact that minority wrestlers must usually take the clean pinfall when it really counts shows that the industry is decades behind the times and is unsure of its own virility. The few exceptions, like Iceman King Parsons, win titles as heels or turn bad soon after so a White face can teach him a lesson. There is a certain faction of the fans that must also share in some of the responsibility with their racist chanting and jeering. When I see children shouting out racial epithets alongside their parents, I feel very uncomfortable and I wonder if the next generation is already tainted. The TV networks such as USA, ESPN and TBS should also shoulder some of the blame. They ignore racism on the wrestling shows that would be immediately dealt with if seen on another type of program. In real sports, the best man wins. If the wrestling industry insists on being thought of as a "real sport" (WWF exempted), it must conduct itself as such. Although the sensationalism created through bigotry may benefit ticket sales in the short term, by presenting it as a fair sport, they can only increase their audience and their self-respect in the long haul. There has to eventually be some moral accountability on the part of those calling the shots.

I have written long angry letters to both the NWA and the WWF regarding this issue, and have received no reply. I can't say that I am surprised.

All We're Saying Is Give The Warrior A Chance

By - Paul J. MacArthur and David Skolnick

When Hulk Hogan did the job for The Ultimate Warrior at Wrestlemania VI, it appeared he was passing the torch to Jim Hellwig. In reality, all that was passed was a World Championship belt as the WWF has not promoted The Ultimate Warrior from the second string position to its main attraction.

For The Ultimate Warrior to become the promotion's top star the WWF needs to focus on him and treat him as the front man. Instead, on the first Saturday Night's Main Event after Wrestlemania VI, the main event involved Hogan, not the World Champion. The key angle of the summer has not been the Rick Rude/Ultimate Warrior series, but the Hulk Hogan/Earthquake confrontation. The television broadcasts have spent more time discussing Hogan's "retirement" than the possibility of Rude becoming the next World Champion. In fact, for the past six weeks, Rude and Warrior have hardly been on TV while Hogan and Earthquake are everywhere, and have become the focal point of the promotion. This hardly seems the way to promote the World Champion and, perhaps, the WWF's man of the 90s.

When Randy Savage won the WWF World Championship at Wrestlemania IV, the WWF immediately pushed him as their top star. Little mention was made of Hogan until the Summer Slam angles were shot. Savage was allowed to be the World Champion and the

WWF's premiere star. He consistently pulled in good to excellent crowds during his feud with Ted DiBiase and proved to be a valuable asset to the promotion. Of course after making Savage the top star of the federation, the WWF killed him off at Wrestlemania V and have done everything within their power to limit his appeal ever since. Hardly understandable from a business perspective, other than to placate Hogan's ego.

While the Savage situation is difficult to understand, the Warrior situation is incomprehensible. Savage was given a chance to become a proven commodity in the WWF and did so. The Warrior has not been given this opportunity. He has been kept in the number two position for some unknown reason. While he is able to draw, his drawing power would be dramatically increased if the WWF promoted him as its top star. It is important for the WWF to do this as it appears Hogan will only be coming back for Summer Slam and a couple of tapings before taking another hiatus from wrestling until mid-fall. While the continuing focus on Hogan may pop a few houses, television tapings and Pay-Per-Views, it can only spell disaster for The Ultimate Warrior's box office potential.

There is a great deal of speculation that The Ultimate Warrior will turn heel for Wrestlemania VII. This may explain why Hogan has remained the top star on WWF broadcasts as they want to continue to promote him as the man to beat. The Warrior's victory over Hogan could be treated as a fluke and Hogan would once again be World Champion. As a one-night stand, this would have tremendous box office potential. From a long-term business standpoint, it's ludicrous. It is becoming increasingly apparent that Hogan lucrative, his desire to wrestle will diminish. He is growing older and now is the time for the WWF to groom their new front man. While many of us cringe at the Warrior's ring performance, he is the second man in the WWF and, as champion, should be groomed to be their front man. He is young enough that he can stay on top for five years. While that thought is sickening, from a business perspective (and after all that is all Vince McMahon cares about), the smartest thing to do would be to establish The Ultimate Warrior as the unbeatable force of the 90s. Focusing on Hogan is focusing on the past. Focusing on the Warrior is focusing on the future. Yet the WWF continues to keep Hogan in the spotlight. On the July 16 edition of Prime Time Wrestling, Gorilla Monsoon was shown taking WWF action figures out of a play ring and putting Hogan's doll in the ring alone. "Set center stage, the guy who should be center stage." Monsoon then said to Heenan "Would you like to name someone that's more important to the WWF than Hulk Hogan is right now?" How about the Warrior? He is, after all, the champion. If he's not the most important person in the promotion then why is he champion?

It is really surprising to see the WWF mishandle their World Champion. While their in-ring product often leaves a great deal to be desired, their ability to market and promote whom they chose has always been their strong point. While there have been a few exceptions, the WWF has usually been able to put over who they want. Now, at a time when Hogan's future appears to be that of WWF elder statesman, they need to promote their new unbeatable superstar. Despite our opinion of his wrestling ability, all indications show the The Ultimate Warrior is the logical choice to succeed Hogan. For some reason, they are forcing the Warrior to prove himself without the benefit of the mass media blitz provided for Hogan and Savage. They are trying to test him without giving him the benefit of their promotional prowess and that doesn't make a great deal of sense. Fans have been cheering Rude in his matches against the Warrior, but this reverse reaction shouldn't be surprising. As the man who put Hogan down for the clean one - two - three, the Warrior was bound to face some resentment. More so than Savage, Warrior needs all the hype the WWF is capable of providing. He needed Hogan to stand up and tell everyone that the Warrior was the champion with his blessing. That he was the unstoppable force that all should cheer. It's too late to do that, but it's not too late to put the bulk of the WWF's attention on The Ultimate Warrior.

It may be a long time before anyone is able to draw the way Hogan did during the 80s. To expect The Ultimate Warrior to live up to Hogan's record is wishful thinking. But it will

be impossible for the Warrior to even come close to drawing the way Hogan did without the benefit of the WWF's media machine. Until they promote the Warrior as the top star of the WWF, fans will always perceive him as second best. As such, fans will have less desire to see him than Hogan. If the WWF is confused why the Warrior isn't drawing the way they hoped he would, they should realize the fans won't support him until the WWF supports him. Hulk Hogan has done a great deal for the WWF, but there comes a time when a promotion has to look to the future and let go of the past. For the WWF, now is the time.

Letters To The Editors

A friend sent me a copy of Wrestling Perspective; my major criticism concerns the tone of your publication. You and some of your subscribers seem to inhabit a tiny aristocratic arena far removed from ordinary folks who enjoy and accept professional wrestling without needing to analyze it under a high powered microscope. The sport is targeted towards the working class and promotes simplistic themes. Perhaps such concepts are maddeningly mundane to an intellectual, but I, for one, am grateful that the "smart" fans (referred to in Jeff Rubin's letter) are not doing the booking. And yes, Jeff, this "average" woman has the awareness to formulate an opinion about alleged racism in professional wrestling without the guidance of sheet writers.

I'm sure you don't mean to alienate readers, but your condescending attitude toward those whom you consider to be less educated or articulate displays the same intolerance as the bigotry you claim to deplore.

Anni Roberts
Easton, MD

A Personal Note If You Will

We'd like to take this opportunity to thank those of you have supported us during our first six issues. Half a year ago, we had no idea how long we would be doing this publication or what the response would be. Since then, we have received heartwarming critical response and we humbly thank everyone who has helped us during our first six months. We hope to continue our analysis and commentary on professional wrestling in the months and years to come.

We also want to mention that your feedback is very important to the success of this publication. We need to know what you think we are doing right and what we are doing wrong. We would also appreciate your comments and opinions on the articles we publish. We see Wrestling Perspective as a forum for debate, as such, we need your input.

Finally, we'd like to say that Issue #7 will be a very special issue. It will deviate a bit from our normal format, but we really think you will enjoy it. We can't say what we are going to do (don't you hate surprises) but please take our word that it will be a special issue that you don't want to miss.

Thanks again for your support for the past six months. We truly are grateful.

End Notes

"The unexamined life is not worth living." - *Socrates*

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